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BEFORE THE HALLOWEEN FIRE....

By Ruby Douglas

"Isn't this quite the most fun we've had?" asked Pauline, laying the last chestnut on the hearth and resuming her seat on the low stool before the fire.

"Quite," replied the man beside her. Pauline looked up. "You're so serious, Teddy. You're always so serious that I feel I should almost call you Theodore, not Teddy."

He smiled indulgently at her. What a child she was in spite of her twenty years! He had known her always, for he was about to be forty.

"Don't, I beg of you. Look, child, my chestnuts are going to pop first."

Pauline framed her face in her hands and rested her elbows on her knees, intently watching the chestnuts open wider and wider.

"Don't forget the names, Teddy. I'd like to know which girl is to have you."

He smiled again. He always smiled at Pauline. He watched the firelight twostep through her ringlets and about the great coil of hair wound gracefully about her pretty head.

"Oh, Teddy," she cried, and dismay was the predominant emotion betrayed in her tone. "They all pop at once."

And it was true. All three of the man's chestnuts had popped simultaneously, leaving Pauline without the satisfaction of knowing whom the Halloween fairies had destined for her companion's wife.

The man laughed. "Watch your own. That fat one on this end seems ready to jump."

Pauline, a shadow of disappointment still on her face, studied her chestnuts. "I can venture a guess as to who that end man is, little girl."

"Can you?" she asked saucily.

"Yes, and he seems to know he is to pop first. He is a confident chap, at least."

Pauline ignored his remarks. The first chestnut was ready to burst, and the middle nut looked ready to follow any minute, but the one on the other



"I'M AFRAID YOU AREN'T GOING TO PROPOSE AT ALL."

end was opening slowly. A frown dodged into the space between Pauline's eyes. What did Halloween fairies know about it anyway?

She moved her stool back and slipped to her knees on the hearth, bending closely over the chestnuts.

"Pop! Of course you would pop first," she scolded, talking to the innocent chestnut that had just found its proximity to the flames too trying.

The man sat back and watched the expressions come and go on her face.

"And you are not glad that one popped first?" he asked. "I fancy I could name him."

"It was he—George Bidwell—but I don't intend to marry him," she retorted, with determination.

The man raised his brows quizzically. It was what he had come to accept as inevitable, that Pauline, his dear little friend, would marry this boy. Certainly it would not be the young man's fault if she did not.

"You silly chestnut," Pauline began, talking obviously to the nut on the far end. "Why are you so slow when you know you should have popped first?"

She did not turn her face toward the man, but kept her eyes on the nuts.

And the man supposed it was the heat from the flames which heightened the color in her cheeks. How pretty she looked! He had never realized before how lovely Pauline really was.

Pop! The middle nut had jumped away. Only one remained.

"That was John Carrington," confessed Pauline, looking up shyly into the face above hers. "Now, wouldn't you like to know who this third slow one is?"

"I would, indeed, but he seems to have little chance."

"Perhaps it is his own fault. He has been lying there so indifferently, hardly seeming to realize that he was near the fire and not seeming to care to jump and pop like all the others."

Pauline was again leaning over the last chestnut, talking half to its inanimate shell, half to herself and not at all to the man now sitting up straight in the chair behind her.

"Aren't you going to tell me who it is?" he asked.

"No," she retorted over her shoulder. Silently they both watched the chestnut. It was opening slowly, very slowly, but surely, and the deep yellow heart was beginning to show through the cracks.

"You're a silly chestnut," said Pauline, shaking her head at it: "you are so slow. You deliberately let all the others get ahead of you." She paused while the flames danced about merrily, trying to urge the nut on to jump.

All unconsciously the man was bending closer to the girl, trying not to lose any of the conversation which was not addressed to him. Somehow it was an interesting soliloquy. Usually he let Pauline ramble on and on, unmindful of her chattering, treating her almost as a child—a dear, lovable child. Now he had an unaccountable curiosity to know for whom she had named the last chestnut. There were so many young men whom she might have chosen.

"You—you think you are old," Pauline was saying still to the chestnut, "but you aren't at all. And you are so serious, and you fancy your hair is gray." Her tone was very low—confidentially low—and she bent more closely over the nut.

"I'm afraid you aren't going to propose at all. I'm beginning to think you will never understand that—that you love me, you funny chestnut," she laughed nervously. The nut was on the verge of jumping, and she was perilously close to it.

"Be careful, dear," said the man. "It might strike your face." And Pauline thought he had never spoken to her so tenderly.

She lowered her eyes quickly. "Oh, chestnut, you are—you are going to pop! You are!"

Pop! The slow nut had jumped, and Pauline excitedly reached out for it and caught it.

"Oh!" she cried, dropping it. The man slipped to the stool beside her. "Why did you do that, child? You've burned yourself," he said, taking her hand in his.

For a moment he held it silently, looking into its pretty pink palm.

"Pauline, who was the last man—the man who hurts you?"

She looked up into his eyes.

"Dearest, can it be? Oh, Pauline, and to think I have never realized until tonight what you are to me!" Her head dropped to his knee.

"You—you almost made me propose to you, Teddy," she mumbled from her refuge. "And if it had not been for Halloween you would never have jumped."

"We'll make up for it by getting married next week."

And that was why the forward chestnut and the deliberate chestnut were allowed to remain side by side until they turned black and crisp.

A Short Recitation.

My parents, well meaning in their way, taught me solemn things about "O man immortal, live for something!" and all such, and I had to humiliate myself by disgorging them in public.

The consequence was that not only on Friday afternoon, but whenever anybody came to visit the school, I was butchered to make a Roman holiday.

But there is one happy memory of a Friday afternoon. Determined to show my friends and fellow citizens that I, too, was born in Arcadia and was a living, human boy, I announced to teacher: "I got another piece."

"Oh, have you?" said she, sure of an extra O-man-immortal intellectual treat. "Let us hear it, by all means."

Whereupon I marched up to the platform and declaimed that deathless lyric:

When I was a boy, I was a bold one.
My mammy made me a new shirt out of dad's old one.

All of it? Certainly. Isn't that enough? That was the only distinctly popular platform effort I ever made. I am proud of it now. I was proud of it then. But the news of my triumph was coldly received at home.—Eugene Wood in McClure's.

Did Dickens Use This Story?

On one occasion, when Dickens and James Payn were "swapping" stories, relates James MacArthur in Harper's Weekly, Payn told the following curious incident to the author of "David Copperfield." Payn, it seems, was returning to his home one summer night through a fashionable street near Piccadilly when a sudden thunderstorm caused him to take refuge under a portico which commanded a view of one of the fashionable houses across the street. As he stood looking into the lighted drawing room a lady dressed in a ball gown appeared at one of the open bow windows, and at the same moment a man who looked like a beggar ran across the street and stood under the window. The lady threw out to him her bouquet. He caught it and, nodding twice to the figure above him, ran off at full speed.

Dickens was greatly interested in this story, and the question is asked whether he ever made use of the incident in any of his novels.

A Complimentary Contradiction.

A New York publisher has a reputation for employing the homeliest stenographers and typewriters in the city. Efficiency rather than beauty is what he wants, and he knows the prettiest ones are not the most efficient. Just the same, it is said of him that he doesn't know a pretty woman when he sees one. Still his wife is an unusually handsome woman.

Not long ago she came into his office, where she appears only at rare intervals and only when it is absolutely necessary. She was met by an office boy, a bright Irish lad, who had never seen her. She asked for Mr. Blank.

"Who shall I say wants to see him, mem?" he inquired.

"His wife," she replied.

THOUSAND MAT HALL.

A Structure That is One of the Wonders of Japan.

One of the wonders of Miyajima is an enormous structure called Thousand Mat hall, a name which means that 1,000 of the regulation 3 by 6 foot rice straw mats are required to cover its floor. All rooms in Japan are measured in this way instead of by feet, so in talking about houses one always says a "six mat room" or "three and a half mat room" until one begins to think in divisions of eighteen square feet. Thousand Mat hall was erected in the sixteenth century out of the wood of a single camphor tree, say the Japanese records, that are always so full of such perfectly wonderful details. If this be so, camphor trees must have grown very large in Japan in the sixteenth century, since the building rests upon a hundred or more piles, each a giant tree trunk in itself, beside which the roof is upheld by at least fifty pillars that were fifty forest monarchs once upon a time. Then there is a floor in the structure made of 18,000 square feet of cedar planks a foot and a half wide and five inches thick, so one must needs believe that its builder outtraced the miracle of the leaves and the fishes if Japan's sober records are to count for anything.

The walls of this ancient hall have doubtless echoed the sounds of many a priestly orgy, since it adjoins the temple and is guarded by a richly wrought seven story pagoda, pushing Anida Rutsu, but the most glorious thing in its history seems to be the fact that Hideyoshi, "the Napoleon of Japan," used it for a council chamber during his remarkable invasion of Korea. Now it is merely a "show place," standing empty and open and gaunt, overlooking the sea—a roost for sacred pigeons and chattering sparrows. It was during the China-Japan war that troops first began to be quartered on the island, and several regiments, for want of better barracks, were encamped in this old historical structure. One evening in half jest, half earnest, a soldier named his rice ladle (meshi toru) to one of the pillars, with a prayer that he and his regiment might soon be sent to help conquer the Chinese. His comrades followed his example, and since then it has become a custom for every visitor to the hall to buy a rice ladle and, writing his name and the date of his visit upon it, with, of course, "Dai Nippon Banzai!" tack it up somewhere in the vast building. The effect is better imagined than described, and it is, I think, unique beneath the sun.—Leslie's Weekly.

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